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ABSTRACT

A disabled writer recounts her experiences in career exploration and planning and suggests that "realistic" planning not be confused with taking the path of least resistance. She lists four necessary actions for meeting the needs of exceptional persons: early identification, amelioration according to identified needs, early and consistent parent counseling with agreed upon comprehensive service plans in the hands of parents, and long range planning from birth to death. (CL)

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A Consumer Looks at Realistic Career Planning

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A Consumer Looks at Realistic Career Planning

Research and other writings reflect data collected from various types of studies. The writer suggests that too often consumers have not been provided the opportunity to share his/her concerns. Therefore, the following information is presented for review and reflection.

I would like to begin my presentation by taking a careful look at the word realistic. This is a word I view with some misgivings because it's a word both misused and overused. Let me cite my own case as an example. As an Information Representative for the West Virginia Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I handle publicity for the agency. This includes writing articles for various newspapers, preparing news releases, working up audio-video presentations, etc. Now, it might have been unrealistic to suggest that I become a newspaper reporter or an English teacher, but it would have been even more unrealistic to advise me to forget about college and go twist bottle tops in a nice sheltered workshop. Realistic career planning to me means matching an exceptional individual's abilities along with his interests and needs to achieve a meaningful vocational perspective. Realistic career planning is not taking the path of least resistance.

Let me give you a brief overview of the obstacles and opportunities I met as I capitalized on my "knack with words" in my realistic career planning. According to my parents, my creative bug first showed itself at the age of five when I composed a prayer. I didn't compose anything more until the ripe old age of ten when I decided to write poetry. All my work had to be dictated since I was unable to write or even type at that time. Now I can type my articles on an electric typewriter that has an eraser key. That brings me to this point: Always keep abreast of new technological advances/a new typewriter, wheelchair, communicating devise or medical discovery/ anything that will maximize your child's or student's chances of reaching his full potential.

Although my parents were proud of my accomplishments, if a composition didn't measure up to what they thought were my best efforts, they told me about it. Don't sell your child short just because he's handicapped. Don't be too demanding, but expect the best and that's what he'll give you. Since the school authorities would not allow me to go to public school, I obtained my education through homebound instruction. This meant that not only was I denied interaction with my peers, but even in my junior and senior high school years, I received no real help with my writing. If the youngster you're working with has any talent, by all means help her/him develop it.

Immediately after graduating from high school, I wanted to go to college, but everyone except my parents and I felt that since there was no guarantee I could make money writing, a college degree for me would be unrealistic. There's that word again. I took some correspondence courses in short story writing on my own, but found I was uncomfortable with fiction. The discovery that non-fiction was my forte came after I started doing book reviews for the local newspaper.

Finally through the efforts of Dr. Jenkins and the West Virginia Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I realized my dream and entered Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, where I majored in English and minored in journalism. At Marshall, I learned so much about the world, life, and myself, both in and out of the classroom. I still wondered, though, how and when I would be able to put what I had learned to good use. I didn't know such a position as Information Representative even existed. It was almost by accident that I learned of the job I now hold. How much easier the going would have been if I and those who were working with me had been more aware of the options that were available. This year, our state Rehabilitation Center is planning a week long celebration in honor of its 25th anniversary. As part of its festivities, I've written a film history of Rehabilitation in general

and the Center in particular, so I am getting the opportunity to utilize my creative abilities. Even though I need to work at a slower pace than most, this complication has been accepted and adjusted to by my employers.

Now that I am employed it would be so easy for me to say: "I did it, so can anyone else" but I know this is not true. Every day I see people like me being sent home to face a future of idle loneliness, a future I once faced. This must change and only when I can help bring about that change, will I feel a real sense of accomplishment.

The preceding statements reveal the pathos, poignancy and truth of a young woman's efforts to become a productive person. Were there alternatives that could and should have been brought to bear upon the writer's situation? Was there parent counseling? Did community agencies, educational and medical services provide comprehensive supportive assistance? Is homebound instruction appropriate for long term educational offerings?

Additional questions, hypotheses, suppositions concerning the past could be set forth; however, the past is complete, but with the advent of state and federal legislation changes are beginning. Parents have organized, professionals and paraprofessionals are planning, cooperating, demanding services according to identified needs are being made available.

Parents usually express the hope that their children will have a better life than they have had. However, it is difficult to hypothesize regarding careers for children who are exceptional. Parents differ in their attitudes towards self and children. These differences must be respected - not always agreed with but at least reviewed.

In order that appropriate action may be taken so that the 'consumer's' experiences are not repeated, there are some "givens" that appear to be mandated. Among the suggestion actions are:

1. early identification of exceptional children--handicapped and gifted;
2. amelioration according to identified needs;
3. early and consistent parent counseling with agreed upon comprehensive service plans in the hands of parents; and
4. long-range planning from birth to death--programming with willingness to change if and when needs emerge.

The writer does not suggest that the answers to working with special individuals are simple or that the previously listed four suggestions are specifics that will always be effective. However, the four general processes or approaches have proved effective in initiating and developing action plans for exceptional individuals. Educative processes are

the responsibilities of all who work with individuals who have handicapping conditions and shared efforts through team cooperation may bring in to effect the hoped for changes or at least the beginnings.

According to P.L. 94-142, the school aged person of a school district is the responsibility of the local education agency (LEA). Therefore, we who are concerned with the appropriate educational orferings must possess adequate and necessary information to implement stated four statements. Lack of process information will not assist the individual with the handicapping condition nor can the agency give needed support services. Immediate answers for each individual may not be available but the questions must be asked. Alternatives must be reviewed and the most appropriate "match" must be made with the willingness to change as needs evolve or are met. The school may serve as the catalyst, but other agencies and related services must be orchestrated. The consumer (child, youth or adult) and the parents or family members must always be partners in the career/educative process.